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WOMEN AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT.

BY M. E. J. KELLEY.

AN observant philosopher discoursing on the labor movement in America remarked, somewhat disconsolately: "With the women of the country rests much of the blame for the slow progress of the labor movement. Upon womankind falls the greater part of the purchasing and in her efforts to secure bargains she overlooks the true economic feature of the case. She thinks only of the present. It is a case where the so-called economic guiding motive of self-interest overreaches itself. The self-interest of the present defeats the self-interest of the long run. Any state of things for which women can be induced to make a concerted demand will be forthcoming. It is only ignorance on the part of women that stands in the way of rational progressive living for the great mass of human beings. The real labor problem is how to bring women to a knowledge of their social responsibilities and duties."

While there is an Adam-like tone of blame for the woman about the labor-philosopher's remarks, they voice a growing appreciation of woman's importance as an economic factor. The changes in economic thought which tend more and more to place the emphasis on consumption and to consider women as the great factors in determining what shall be consumed, indicate that women must be very seriously considered in the solution of the problems of industrial production. The economic and sociological needs of the time furnish an overlooked argument for the cultivation of the mental powers of women. Since they are the determining factors in consumption they need, even more than men, the power of generalizing, ability to see the broad field, and estimate the general effect of particular deeds.

All sorts of people talk a great deal about the labor move-

ment nowadays, but there seems to be a general hazy vagueness about their terminology. As a matter of fact there is no regularly organized labor movement with definite aims and plan of action. The Knights of Labor represent one movement, the American Federation of Labor another, while the Social Democracy and the Socialists, idealist, materialist, Christian, or Marxian are seeking a similar goal by quite different routes. All have points of agreement, to be sure, and of late there seems to be a growing tendency on the part of the more powerful labor organizations to make themselves class factors in politics.

Everywhere the labor movement means the struggle of the workers and their sympathizers to secure a better home-life, more healthful conditions in workshops, educational opportunities, and all the rights and privileges of citizenship for men and women, time and opportunity to develop the spiritual and the beautiful side of their lives and characters as well as the money-making side. Broadly speaking, the labor movement means simply the sum of all the efforts of all sorts of people to elevate the physical, mental, and moral character of the producers, through the improvement of the material conditions which surround them. In this sense the college settlements, the social settlements, the Church Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, the farmers' grange, the social reform clubs, the Christian Socialists, the working-girls' clubs, are all a part of the labor movement, as well as the American Federation of Labor and the assemblies of the Knights of Labor.

Two classes of women are more or less prominent in all these organizations—those doing and those done for; those who are wage-earners and those who are not. The wage-earners may be classed in the trade-unions, Knights of Labor, and working girls' clubs; the non-wage-earners in college and social settlements, Women's Christian Temperance Union, farmers' granges, Consumers' Leagues, etc.

Perhaps a third class should be added—the women who are neither wage-earners nor women of leisure—the home-keeping wives and mothers of workingmen. Sometimes, to be sure, their influence is all against the union and the labor movement, but in most instances they back their breadwinners with heroic fealty in any fight for more wages, shorter hours, or anything else the union thinks it right to ask. Upon them,

too, falls the brunt of the fight. They know better than any statistician how much wages are lost and how little food a family can live on during a strike. And rarely does their faith or hopefulness waver. Not infrequently, as in the case of the coal miners' strike last summer, they not only bear the suffering incidental to all strikes with heroic patience, but they bring mother-wit to help in the solution of the problems of the strikers. They picket shops and try persuasion on renegades; that failing they take advantage of the partial immunity their sex gives them and use measures to disable the "scabs" who have taken their husbands' places.

The woman of leisure is a comparatively new factor. It is scarcely a generation since titled ladies in England began to use their wealth and position and superior education for the betterment of the conditions under which their wage-earning sisters were employed. In the United States the appearance of the woman of wealth or leisure or culture in the labor movement is of still more recent date. The sudden development of the Knights of Labor in the early eighties began it. Many teachers, women physicians, and other women following intellectual pursuits found themselves drawn by that force into the militant labor movement. Miss Dodge, daughter of a New York millionaire, followed with her working-girls' clubs as a scheme for the improvement, through the development of character, of factory workers. About the same time Mrs. Josephine Shaw Lowell, widow of Gen. Charles Russell Lowell, turned her attention to the organization of Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration in trades already having strong unions, with such success that there have been few or no strikes among the bricklayers and masons in New York, Boston, or Chicago for fifteen years.

The development of college and social settlements drew to the movement women of wealth and culture, particularly in Chicago and Boston where the settlement workers are in close touch with the trade unions. In Boston the women of Dennison House are members of a federal labor union and have organized a union of women engaged in the tailoring trade. The head-worker at the settlement is a delegate to the Central Labor Union. Hull House, Chicago, is likewise represented in the local federation of trade unions. It also furnishes a meeting place for unions and courses of lectures on economics.

Women of social position have lent their influence to the agitation for legislative inquiries into the conditions under which women are employed, the establishment of bureaus of labor statistics, the passage of factory inspection laws, and the appointment of women factory inspectors, all of which are of recent accomplishment and testify to the influence of women in the labor movement. Nowhere else indeed are the college graduates, the women most representative of the advantages and opportunities gained by women in this century, more conspicuous than among the social reformers.

The labor movement in this country may be divided into two periods, the first extending from 1800 to 1861, and the second from the Civil War to the present time. With the first period women of any class had little to do, and women of leisure, wealth, or culture, nothing at all. It was not until the 40's, when the tide of immigration set in, that women began to be factors worth considering at all in industrial production, and it was not until after the war that inventions and changes in methods, together with the great number of women thrown on their own resources by the death of the breadwinners in the war, made women of importance in economic affairs. While the economic position of woman was being revolutionized, democratic ideals were changing, organization was progressing rapidly among workingmen, middle-class women were wringing opportunities for higher education from the conservative keepers of colleges, the agitation for political privileges for women reached a stage where it began to be taken seriously, and all these things together tended to bring women to the front and to interest the public in their affairs.

Odd enough it must seem to those who believe women chronically opposed to warfare, that in the period before the war woman's appearance in the labor movement was usually as a riotous striker. Strikes were not infrequent and they were nearly always hopeless in those early days when imprisonment was apt to be the portion of the daring spirit who injured his employers by refusing to work for whatever his benefactor chose to pay him. But in spite of the danger women were in the thick of the fray. There were women among the mill hands of Paterson, N. J., who struck in 1834 for a reduction of hours. The factory regulations required all hands, men, women, and children, from seven years upward, to be at work at half-past four in the morn-

ing. The strikers were willing to work thirteen hours a day, but they drew the line at that. Their demands were finally conceded. Less successful were those famous mill girls of Lowell of whom Dickens and Harriet Martineau spoke with such admiration. They have been held up as models for all future generations of mill girls. The fact that they went on strike in 1836 is rarely mentioned, however. The ringleader was an eleven-year-old girl. It is said, when a reduction of wages was announced, she led her comrades out of the mill, and mounting a pump made an inflammatory speech. She was promptly chastised and sent back to her work, and the revolt ended then and there.

The first definite step toward an organized labor movement was the holding of a convention of representatives from workingmen's associations in Baltimore in 1866. The anti-slavery and women's rights agitations had accustomed the people somewhat to women as speakers on public platforms, but they were not women of the working class, and it was, perhaps, too much to expect women delegates to be present at that first convention. Even at this time, however, there were some strong trades organizations having women on their membership rolls. One of the most powerful was the Order of the Knights of St. Crispin, a union of shoemakers. The women of the trade were organized in a special branch called the Daughters of St. Crispin.

Although there were no women representatives at the convention of 1866, the women wage-earners were not overlooked, though the remedies proposed for their wrongs could hardly have conveyed much hope to those of them who interested themselves in the proceedings.

In the platform of principles to which the delegates declared their fealty there were two planks relating to women. The first ran thus: "Resolved, that with the equal application of the fundamental principles of our republican democratic government and a sound monetary system, there could be no antagonism between the interests of the workingmen and the workingwomen of this country, nor between any branches of productive industry, the direct operation of each, when not prevented by unjust monetary laws, being to benefit all the others by the production and distribution of the comforts and necessities of life; and that the adoption by the government of the financial policy set forth in this platform will put an end to the oppression of

workingwomen and is the only means of securing to them, as to workingmen, the just rewards of their labor."

A greenback financial policy could hardly have conveyed much uplift to the poorly paid sewing women who were suffering just then not only from insufficient wages but from inability to collect the too small price of their hire. The sudden outpouring from the home into the market of women unused to the ways of the business world was probably too tempting an opportunity to the unscrupulous to be allowed to pass. So great was the evil that public attention was drawn to it, and in New York the Working Women's Protective Union was organized for the express purpose of collecting the wages of which women were defrauded.

The most important feature of the convention at Baltimore, so far as its doings related to women, was the changed attitude shown by workingmen toward the women who were rapidly invading the trades hitherto monopolized by men. Women were taken up on a level with men as wage-earners. Outspoken antagonism to their entrance into trades and trades-unions was classed as out of order. Woman's right to equal wages for equal work was clearly recognized. Her wrongs were noted, and the desire to help her to help herself was recorded. Another resolution was adopted: "Resolved, that we pledge our individual and undivided support to the sewing women and daughters of toil in the land, and would solicit their hearty co-operation, knowing as we do that no class of industry is so much in need of having their condition ameliorated as the factory operatives and sewing women of this country." Still again, it was resolved that "women are entitled to equal pay for equal services with men; that the practice of working women and children ten to fifteen hours a day at starvation prices is brutal in the extreme, and subversive of the health, intelligence and morality of the nation, and demands the interposition of law."

Altogether the convention marked an epoch in the relation of the American workingwoman to the labor movement. Workingmen recognized her as an economic factor. Objection to her entrance into trades could no longer be organized or official. Her eligibility to membership in trade unions was hereafter to be based on the same grounds as applied to any other worker. Immigration no doubt had considerable effect on the situation. The

establishment of new industries after the war attracted many skilled workmen from England and Scotland and Germany. Among other things they brought with them their trade-union notions. Women were members of the German cigarmakers' unions and the American cigarmakers' union was very young, indeed, when women were first admitted to membership. The textile industry developed amazingly in the years following the war and thousands of English and Scotch spinners and weavers came to work in the mills. It was among these people and in this particular industry that modern trade-unionism first developed. Women had always been members of the unions; in fact, at Oldham, in England, one of the centres of the industry, the membership was almost equally divided between the sexes.

With the coming of the Knights of Labor the distinctively American woman became for the first time conspicuous in the labor movement. One of the marked peculiarities of the phase of the labor movement which flowed and ebbed in the decade of the eighties was the position of the Knights of Labor on the woman question and the attitude of women towards the order. Possibly because the founders, being tailors, were personally intimate with the sewing trade, the order was convinced that workingwomen were even more oppressed than men and that no permanent good could come to the masses until this lower layer of the social structure should have been elevated. Consequently Knights of Labor everywhere endeavored to ameliorate the conditions under which women were employed. Woman was urged to throw off her traditional yoke of meekness and dependence, and encouraged to become the valiant woman, strong in the cause of righteousness. When girls struck either against indecent treatment—no unusual cause apparently ten or fifteen years ago—or for fair conditions or wages, large sums of money were raised to support them. In other directions the Knights of Labor took up the cudgels in defence of women. The order demanded from its members proper treatment of women, and failure to fall in line with the general enlightened view of the rights of woman, even when she was a member's own wife, was sometimes followed by a social boycott. The story is told of a Knight of Labor who abused his wife in spite of many warnings. Finally he was expelled from the local assembly. Unable to get work in his own town, he went to Canada to escape

the opprobrium in which he was held. But even there he found that word had gone ahead of him to the Canadian Knights to have nothing to do with "the unworthy scoundrel, who was a disgrace to the order."

Any estimate of the total number of women who have been Knights of Labor must be pure guesswork, as the number constantly fluctuated. One hundred and fifty, even two hundred thousand would probably be quite within bounds. In New York alone, in 1887, it is said there were 60,000 women in seventy-five local assemblies. In 1885, in Haverhill, Mass., a centre of the shoemaking industry, there were seven assemblies, one having a membership of 800 women. The women in the Knights of Labor were not all workingwomen. All classes were admitted to membership except bankers, lawyers, and saloon-keepers, and many women of leisure and others distinguished in intellectual ways were active workers in the order.

To the strict trade-unionist who believes that only by a thorough organization of all trades can any real good come to workmen or workingwomen there is something particularly discouraging in the history of women in the labor movement, considering it in its narrow sense. It has been with all women's trade-unions as with the Knights of Labor. A sort of fever of enthusiasm possesses the members for a year or two. They plan and dream glorious things and act rashly. Then they fall back into their old apathetic attitude, and the labor movement, so far as they are concerned, appears to be retrogressing until a new generation of workers appears. Five years after the Knights of Labor was at the height of its power, and had 150,000 women in its ranks, it would have been difficult to find 10,000 women Knights of Labor from one end of the land to the other. The Federation of Labor has never appealed to women as strongly as did the Knights of Labor. Except in trades in which both men and women are employed, there are very few women in the Federation. At present it is estimated that about ten per cent. of the workmen of the country belong to some sort of a labor union, and only one per cent. of the women.

The influence of a labor organization, however, cannot be measured by its membership at any given time, nor can its influence upon the position or condition of women wage-earners be measured by the number of women in its ranks. While it is dif-

difficult to point to specific concessions from employers in the way of reduced hours or increased wages, a broad view of the field shows that the labor movement in the second period of its development has brought great improvements for working women. Out of the agitation and co-operation of the many forces which go to make the modern labor movement, have come the factory laws and the women factory inspectors, laws which give married women the right to their own wages, laws which help them to recover their wages from dishonest employers.

Public opinion is after all the great power in the improvement of conditions, and the most important effect of the agitation aroused by the Knights of Labor and continued by the American Federation, the moulding of public opinion, is often overlooked. Leonora Barry, a mill girl of Schenectady, who was blacklisted for her prominence in a strike, was commissioned by the national officers of the Knights of Labor to investigate the conditions under which women were employed. It was the first systematic inquiry of its kind, and the widespread publicity given her findings was most influential in calling public attention to many evils, and in forming public opinion on labor questions. The National Labor Bureau, then only recently formed, set its machinery at work on a similar investigation. Several State bureaus undertook to unearth the facts within their own territory. Shocked individuals and disbelieving private societies began investigations on their own account. Legislation to remedy flagrant abuses speedily followed.

The reiterated declaration that women should receive equal pay for equal work has not been without results. The injustice of the present inequality is more generally recognized, and there is a growing tendency toward equality of wages—in public employment at least. The attitude of men toward the problem is changing. That a man is supposed always to have a family to support, and a woman never, is rarely urged nowadays, as it was once, as sufficient reason for paying women smaller wages. Recently the Mayor of New York came out boldly in favor of equal wages for equal work for men and women teachers in the public schools. Public education associations have been formed for the purpose of bringing about equality of wages for teachers. Indirectly this must influence other occupations. "Equal wages for equal work" is more important now than ever, because the easily

operated machine makes women as skillful workers as men. If the notion that women ought to receive less wages prevails the man's standard must come down toward hers.

The labor movement has always stood for greater educational opportunities for the workers, and this phase of the agitation is having its effect on workingwomen and on the home. Technical training, art education, the teaching of domestic economy, which are gradually being made a part of the public school system, will have much to do with raising the standard of living. The club movement among women is teaching the value of organization and co-operation, is unconsciously broadening women's sympathies and breaking down false ideals and artificial barriers. The impetus toward all these things was given by the labor movement, and they are gradually bringing women into the labor movement. From it all is coming recognition that the greatest need of the time is education on sociological questions and the development of the idea of social responsibilities. Two classes of women have become factors, and a third (or is it a fourth?) class, the most important of all, remains to be reached. For, after all, the women who are in the majority, the women who are the great industrial power, are those who are neither rich nor poor, neither students, nor society butterflies, nor working girls, the great body of ordinary women whose time is given up to taking care of their households, to buying the supplies for their families, and thereby keeping the whole industrial machinery in motion. Could they once be brought to a knowledge of their importance in the economic circle, made to feel that the buying of so small a thing as a spool of thread is a social function, a lot of vexing problems would speedily be solved. The labor movement of the past has concerned itself with women as producers; the labor movement of the future must deal with womankind in her more important capacity as a consumer.

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